



Difference Matters evaluation

Information sheet and opt-out procedures for parents/carers

Dear Parent or Carer,

Carshalton High School for Girls is taking part in Difference Matters - a new education programme designed to support neurodivergent young people in mainstream secondary schools. Being neurodivergent means your brain works a bit differently from most people's. This means that you might think, learn, focus, move, or experience the world differently to most people. This could include things like ADHD, autism, dyslexia, dyspraxia, dyscalculia, or Tourette's, and other differences in thinking, learning, or talking. The programme aims to improve students' experiences of school and reduce absences, suspensions, and exclusions.

Difference Matters was developed by London's Violence Reduction Unit and delivered in partnership with Creative Education and Living Proof. Creative Education deliver termly training sessions to support schools and Living Proof support schools in embedding a youth voice.

Your child is invited to take part in research led by the Anna Freud Centre, which is evaluating how helpful the Difference Matters programme is for schools and students. We are asking for your permission for your child to take part.

Before you decide, please read the following information sheet. It explains:

- 1) What the research involves for you and your child.
- 2) How to contact us if you do not want your child to take part in this research.

If you have any questions about the programme or the research, you can contact lcole@carshaltongirls.org.uk

Yours sincerely,

Ms Laura Cole

Difference Matters Coordinator

What is this evaluation about?

Your child's school is taking part in the Difference Matters programme, delivered by Creative Education and Living Proof. The programme aims to empower young people, raise awareness of neurodivergence, and improve students' experiences at school.

Your child's participation will help our research team to understand what helps schools become more inclusive and supportive of neurodivergent students, and how to make schools a better place for all students.

All research like this is reviewed by an independent group, called a Research Ethics Committee, to make sure it is safe and fair for everyone taking part. This evaluation has been approved by the University College London (UCL) Research Ethics Committee (ID: 2063).

Why are we writing to parents and carers?

We are asking for your permission for your child to take part in a short survey that is part of the programme evaluation. Please read this document carefully before you decide, so you know exactly what taking part would involve.

Why has my child been asked to take part and what will they do?

Your child is being invited to take part because we would like to hear from them about making school a better place. We are very interested in hearing what they think, and learning more from what they can share with us. We are inviting other children in your child's school group to take part as well.

If your child takes part, they will be asked to complete an anonymous online survey at school. It will take about 15 minutes and will be completed twice – once in the spring term 2026 and again in the summer term 2027.

The survey will ask about:

- Whether they consider themselves to be neurodivergent
- Their experiences in school
- How supported and included they feel at school.

Your child's answers will not be shared with their teachers, friends, or with you, unless they ask an adult to help them complete the survey.

Even if you give permission for your child to take part, it is still their choice whether or not to complete the survey at school.

Does my child have to take part?

No, taking part is completely optional. You and your child can decide together whether to take part. Your child does not have to take part if they do not want to.

We would like as many students as possible to join, as this helps us understand what makes a difference for young people. But if you or your child choose **not** to take part, this will not affect their rights, support, or experience at school in any way.

You have **one week** from receiving this information to opt out.

- If you're **happy for your child to take part**, you don't need to do anything – they'll automatically be included.
- If you **do not want** your child to take part, please let us know by **Friday 30 January 2026** by emailing lcole@carshaltongirls.org.uk . The school will then make sure your child does not complete the survey.

If your child starts the survey, they can stop at any time and do not have to give a reason. However, once they submit their answers, we won't be able to remove them because the survey is anonymous (we can't link answers back to individuals).

What will happen to the information that is collected?

When your child completes the online survey, they will not be asked to enter their name – only their school name and year group.

The survey website is secure and password protected, and all data will be stored safely on a secure, password-protected server. Only senior members of the research team will be able to access this information.

Once all surveys have been completed, we will analyse the data to see whether pupils' responses change before and after the Difference Matters programme is delivered.

Safeguarding

Sometimes, questions in the survey may make a child feel upset. If this happens, you or your child should contact your school's safeguarding or pastoral lead.

If you or your child do not feel able to contact us, you can reach out to external support services for help, such as **The Samaritans** (Tel: 116 123, www.samaritans.org) or **Childline** (Tel: 0800 1111, www.childline.org.uk)

What will happen to the results of this project?

Your child's survey responses will be combined with information from other students who take part in the study. This will allow us to look for patterns and see whether the Difference Matters programme is helpful for young people.

The results will be shared in reports, for example on the websites of the Anna Freud Centre, UCL, and the Violence Reduction Unit (VRU). The VRU is made up of a team of specialists who seek to understand the reasons behind violence and what we can do to prevent it. These reports will not include any personal information, and it will not be possible to identify individual students from the findings.

What happens next?

If you are happy for your child to take part, then you do not need to do anything.

If you **do not want your child to take part**, please let us know by emailing the student's full name and form group with the subject title as Difference Matters Opt Out to lcole@carshaltongirls.org.uk

We hope your child will really enjoy taking part in the evaluation but if you are worried about anything or are unhappy with the way that the research is conducted you can contact the Principal Investigator, Dr Jenna Jacob, Anna Freud Centre, 4-8 Rodney Street, London, N1 9JH jenna.jacob@annafreud.org

If you want to take a concern further, then you can also contact the Chair of the UCL Research Ethics Committee: ethics@ucl.ac.uk.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.

Your help makes our research possible!